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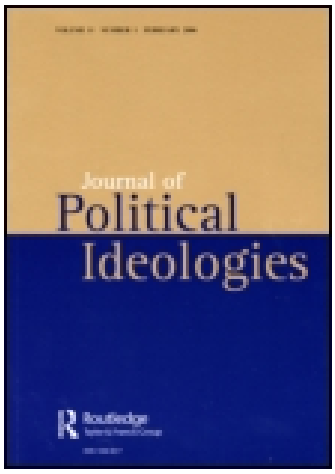

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Russian conservatism in the Putin presidency: The dispersion of a hegemonic discourse

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Russian conservatism in the Putin presidency: The dispersion of a hegemonic discourse

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ABSTRACT *The article traces the emergence and development of conservative discourse in Russian politics from its initial articulation in the late 1990s to its present hegemony in Russian political space. Approaching conservatism in Foucauldian terms as a discursive 'system of dispersion', Russian conservative discourse is analysed not as a coherent ideological doctrine but as a space of discursive self-definition of its practitioners. From this perspective, a dualism is articulated between 'liberal' and 'left' conservative strands in contemporary Russian discourse. While liberal conservatism accords with the main tendencies of the Putin presidency in seeking to reinscribe the gains of the anticommunist revolution of the early 1990s as a secure foundation of the new political order, 'left conservatism' is characterised by an irreconcilable opposition to the order that descends from that revolution and a consequent attempt to 'repoliticise' the foundations of the existing regime. The article concludes with an interpretation of the problematic relation that both strands of the conservative discourse establish with the 'moment of the political' that characterised Russian politics in the 1990s.*

> While there are indeed results of the Revolution, whose value can be questioned, it will never be possible to forget the disposition that has been revealed through it. (Michel Foucault)

Introduction: Conservative discourse as a space of dispersion

This article seeks to map the emergent discursive field of 'conservatism' in Russian politics in the context of the reshapement of the political space in the Putin presidency. The political supremacy of the figure of the President has raised the question of the formation of ideological hegemony in Russian politics, which, during Putin's first term, was gradually articulated around a nodal point of conservatism. Conservatism has functioned as a modality of political self-identification that ventures to transcend the dualisms, characteristic of the

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Russian politics of the late 1980s and the 1990s, most notably, 'democrats' versus 'communists' and 'liberals' versus 'patriots'. The claim to hegemony is thus strongly tied with the overcoming of the political polarisation of the early stages of Russian postcommunism and connects with the widely perceived stabilisation and consolidation that mark the moment of the Putin presidency. At the same time, the discourse of conservatism is also cast as a challenge to the presidency, inciting it to a clear political alignment as opposed to a technocratic and depoliticised stance that Putin's discourse has arguably been marked by.[1] The electoral cycle of 2003–2004 only serves to enhance the importance of the problematic of conservatism, as the two winners of the elections, the pro-presidential United Russia party and the new movement Motherland (*Rodina*), have both emphasised their transcendence of the left–right dualism and toyed with the self-definition as 'conservative'. The defeat of the conventional 'left' and 'right' forces (Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Union Of Right Forces, Democratic Party 'Yabloko') was also welcomed by critical commentators as a clearing for the emergence of a new type of discourse in Russian politics.

'Conservatism' has thus become a designator of a privileged modality of discourse, a marker of the emergent ideological hegemony in the Putin presidency. At the same time, the discursive space, tied together by the concept of conservatism, is, in full accordance with Foucault's definition of discourse, a 'space of dispersion'.[2] As our analysis of the discourse of Russian conservatism will demonstrate, this discursive space is not merely *fragmented* into two antagonistic perspectives, identified by their practitioners as *liberal* and *left conservatisms*, but that this line of fragmentation is in fact a key *constitutive dualism* in the contemporary Russian political space. It is thus impossible to speak of the 'conservative discourse' in Russia, if one understands discourse in a facile manner as a coherent set of statements, an ideological or a normative system. Indeed, one of the striking features of the discursive space that we are going to analyse is the manifest incommensurability of the various strands of discourse united under the rubric of 'conservatism'. At the same time, the lines of diffraction within this space of dispersion are *immanent* to Russian conservatism, drawn within this discourse and hence are part and parcel of the new hegemony, rather than indicators of its contradictions, incoherence or underdevelopment. In contrast to the few existing studies of Russian conservatism,[3] this article does not seek to describe the Russian discourse against the background of some stable ready-made definition of conservatism, in whose terms it may be found wanting, but analyses 'Russian conservatism' as a mode of discursive *self-definition* of its practitioners. We are thus interested not in assessing the conformity of Russian conservative discursive practices to any established concept of conservatism, but in the way these practices reconstruct the concept itself in the concrete context of Russian postcommunism. In other words, rather than engage in a necessarily interminable polemic over the question of who or what is 'really' conservative, of whether the self-definition of the practitioners of the conservative discourse is 'correct' according to some preconceived criterion, of which there of course may be many, we seek to approach Russian conservatism in the nominalist manner (characteristic of, though not restricted to the Foucauldian analysis of discourse) as a designator of a series of

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dispersed discursive practices, which nonetheless all identify themselves as conservative and provide different, and at times thoroughly incommensurable, grounds for such an identification. This methodological premise entails that the task of this article is furthest away from the reductionist assessment of the contemporary Russian conservatism in terms of a certain conceptual standard, belonging to either Western or Russian intellectual traditions. Instead, we seek to do justice to the emergent conservative discourse by accentuating the innovative character of many of its practices.

What is at stake in our argument against the tyranny of ready-made analytical categories is of course the very opposite of the complacent traditionalism that draws consolation from the overused phrase of Fyodor Tytchev: 'Russia can't be embraced by mind'.

> Unfortunately many explanations refer to the exceptionality of Russia, its particular traditions, culture, religion, etc. What remains absolutely unclear are the mechanisms, through which these 'traditions' traverse history, from generation to generation, in a presumably invariable and ready-made manner. [...] *The discourse of 'Russia's exceptionality' thus remains abstract, theoretical and ultimately authoritarian.* The exclusive status of Russia means merely the exclusion of the political subject from the process of decision.[4]

Thus, the point of departure of this paper is that the task of 'embracing Russia by mind' is perfectly achievable and is best approached through analysing emergent practices in their irreducible specificity to outline their inherent (and *ipso facto* specific) *rationality* without collapsing it into a complacent quasi-universalist *rationalism* of the observer. 'The main problem when people try to rationalise something is not to investigate whether or not they conform to principles of rationality, but to discover *which kind of rationality* they are using'.[5] Against the chimerical attributions to Russian politics of 'cultural exceptionality', we rather assert the exceptional nature of postcommunism as an *event,* the understanding of which requires a dispensation with the ready-made conceptual apparatus and the appreciation of the foundational flux of the Russian 'politics of emergence'[6] in the 1990s, the flux that the conservative discourses, discussed in this paper, all seek to come to terms with. The background for our analysis of the contemporary discourse of Russian conservatism is thus provided not by the stable intellectual construct of the 'Russian tradition', either Imperial or Soviet, but, on the contrary, by the profound historical discontinuity that postcommunist Russia descends from. The next chapter traces the emergence of the discourse of conservatism in the early period of the Putin presidency and discusses the shift of the more established liberal forces towards a 'liberal-conservative' position. We then proceed to the discussion of the articulation of a rival discursive grouping that defines itself as the 'left-conservative opposition' to the Putin project. The conclusion of the paper locates the two strands of Russian conservatism within the context of Russia's politics of emergence and problematises their 'coming to terms' with the event of postcommunism.

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'That other thought': Liberal conservatism in the Putin presidency

The 'right turn' and the Putin project

Although the popularity of the concept of conservatism as a modality of political self-identification increased sharply in the Putin presidency, the concept itself has figured in the Russian political discourse since its very emergence in 1991, although its presence has arguably been spectral, oscillating between the elusive status of conservatism as an object of desire and its inevitably disappointing empirical embodiment. A number of phantom political parties of various orientations have used the concept in their official titles (the Conservative Party of Lev Ubozhko, the Conservative Movement 'New Force' of Sergei Kirienko, etc.), while various high-profile political analysts and commentators (e.g., Andranik Migranyan, Vitaly Naishul) identified themselves as conservatives in order to be distinguished from both the dominant 'liberal-democratic' political orientations and the oppositional strands, which in the 1990s converged around the 'left-patriotic' platform of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF). It is partly against the background of the weakening of the polarised left/right spectrum in the late 1990s that the conservative discourse was first articulated in the election campaign of 1999–2000, marked by the emergence of the figure of Putin as a challenger to both the national-patriotic 'left' and the pro-Western 'right'.

The sharp rise of the popularity of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin posed the question of his political platform, which was widely perceived to be ambiguous, i.e. not easily fitted within the dominant dualistic constellation, resulting in the proverbial question of 'who is Mr. Putin?' A highly influential attempt to answer this question was made by Leonid Polyakov in an article entitled 'The Liberal Conservative'. According to Polyakov, Putin's socioeconomic reform programme is *substantively* liberal, and thus continuous with the dominant orientation of the Yeltsin presidency, but *situationally* and *stylistically* conservative, which accounts for its perceived heterogeneity with the Yeltsin project. In this understanding, that recalls Samuel Huntington's seminal argument, conservatism as an 'ideological' orientation does not have its own *substantive core* (unlike, e.g., liberalism or socialism), but is constituted by a number of *stylistic* features that are opposed to similarly situational orientations such as, e.g., 'revolutionism'.[7] Moreover, as Huntington argued, these stylistic features may be deployed to defend any particular ideological content or institutional order, insofar as it can no longer be defended in its own terms. In the context of the Putin project, these features include the rhetoric of consolidation and normalisation after the turbulent and antagonistic politics of the 1990s, the abandonment of doctrinaire policy orientations in favour of a variably understood 'pragmatism', the refusal of the wholesale condemnation of Soviet history, the reaffirmation of sovereignty in foreign policy, etc.

Putin's 1999 policy manifesto 'Russia at the Millennium' explicitly proposes 'grounding' or 'domesticating' substantive principles of the liberal ideology for the purposes of arriving at a (typically conservative) 'organic synthesis': 'We can hope for the future if we can organically synthesise the *universal principles* of market

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economy and democracy with the *Russian reality*'.[8] More concretely, these dimensions take shape in Putin's project of 'reconstitution of the state' along its vertical and horizontal axes, autonomising the sovereign subjectivity of the state from, respectively, regional and business elites, which throughout the 1990s have dominated the space of statehood, putting into question the very existence of state subjectivity.[9] Polyakov's notion of Putin's situational conservatism permits a more nuanced understanding of 'Putinism' than the one provided in the accounts that conceive of it solely in terms of a 'backlash' or 'reaction' against the liberal democratic aspirations of the Yeltsin presidency. While the Yeltsin presidency *initiated* the political rupture of the anticommunist revolution and subsequently attempted to introduce elements of the liberal order in the situation of permanent political confrontation and a drastically weakened statehood, the Putin presidency arguably attempts a *closure* of the unlimited political field and its *grounding* through the installation of the infrastructure of the liberal order and its stabilisation in accordance with what the President has referred to as the 'logic of normal life'.[10]

In the argument of Yegor Gaidar, Russia's first reformist prime minister, the Putin presidency offers a possibility for an *evolutionary* course of liberal reforms that would derive their strength from the overall socio-political stabilisation and consolidation.[11] Gaidar suggests that Putin's project may, in the case of its success, displace the age-old dualism between 'reforms' and 'order', according to which the periods of reform in Russia have always been marked by chaos and illegality, while the subsequent restoration of order entailed the abandonment of all reformist activity. In contrast, Putin's conservatism is conditioned by the conception of the decade of the 1990s as not a 'time of troubles' to be left behind but as a sufficient *ground* to build upon in the project of consolidation and ordering. Postcommunist Russia, in the Putinian vision, has already generated enough that is worth conserving. Thus, Polyakov offers the injunction for the market-oriented liberals that in the Russian political jargon are referred to as 'young reformers' to become 'young conservatives'.[12]

This injunction was indeed heeded by many of the representatives of the liberal forces. The electoral success of the Union of Right Forces (URF) in 1999 may be explained by the gradual shift of the liberal discourse towards a more situationally conservative orientation, exemplified concretely by the support of the party for Putin's presidential candidacy. This orientation is personified by such URF leaders as Sergei Kirienko and Anatoly Chubais and has been expounded in detail in the programmatic article of one of the leaders of URF, Alexei Ulykaev, entitled 'The Right Turn'.[13] Ulykaev's call for the 'right turn' in Russian politics proceeds from the need to overcome the dualisms of the Russian political discourse that have led to the decline and discreditation of liberal forces during the 1990s, primarily the oppositions between 'reforms' and 'stability', 'liberalism' and 'statism', 'pro-Westernism' and 'patriotism'. According to Ulykaev, the 'right forces' (an alternative term to the discredited 'liberals' or 'democrats') are able to offer a strategy that combines the positive values of both terms in the opposition, synthesising reforms and social stability, the strong state and the free economy, international integration and patriotic values.

Most notably, this synthesis is furthest away from the sterile and half-hearted maxims of 'centrist pragmatism'. Ulykaev's strategy combines the characteristically neoliberal universalisation of economic rationality with an explicit valorisation of strong statehood, idiosyncratically conceived as neither a liberal 'night watchman' nor the interventionist Leviathan, but as an 'emergency state', summed up by the fortunate metaphor of a 'fire brigade'.[14] This disposition levels the distinction between 'statism' and 'liberalism', being a consistent combination of the *extreme* variants of both positions, that brings to mind Carl Schmitt's design for a 'qualitatively total state',[15] strong *not* because of its scope of intervention but by virtue of its effort of *self-limitation* that sustains a state-free domain of the economy.

Other features of Ulykaev's manifesto that 'take liberties' with the dominant precepts of 'liberal-democratic' trends in the Russian discourse concern his sharp criticism of the excesses of Russia's 'regionalisation' which resulted in the fragmentation of the common socioeconomic space and the flourishing of 'regional despotisms'. With regard to Russia's foreign policy, Ulykaev is sharply critical of the 'humanitarian interventionist' world order and the correlate denigration of the principle of state sovereignty. It is important to note that the article in question was written in the aftermath of the NATO campaign against Yugoslavia, which, in the argument of another key figure in the Russian conservative discourse, Yegor Holmogorov, was a landmark phenomenon in Russian politics that thoroughly delegitimised naïve pro-Western attitudes even in the liberal circles.[16]

Secondly, the international context of the 1999 election campaign was marked by the sharp European criticism of Russia's military operation in the Chechen Republic, which for Ulykaev marked the very essence of liberal conservatism as the assertion of Russia's sovereignty against the unconstitutional separatist regime, whose internal politics manifestly contradicted any conceivable version of liberalism. The first articulation of liberal conservatism thus unfolded in the unfavourable context of Russian–European relations, which resulted in Ulykaev's strong emphasis on retaining Russia's sovereign autonomy in relation to the EU, notwithstanding the fact that the fundamental principles of liberal conservatism, from the defence of the principle of state sovereignty to the rejection of state intervention in the economy, are taken to lie squarely in the European tradition, albeit a tradition allegedly 'betrayed' by the more left-liberal and socialist forces within Europe. This contrast actualises a distinction of 'true' and 'false' Europe, that according to Iver Neumann has been a permanent fixture of Russia's historical discourse on its relation to Europe,[17] whereby the question of being inside or outside of Europe was complicated by the fragmentation of the figure of Europe itself into a 'true' Europe (variably conceived as liberal or socialist) and the 'false' Europe, the object of negative identification of various Russian discourses. Ulykaev's discourse asserts its own 'true-European' identity by conjuring the 'liberal tradition' in the situationally conservative manner and defending it against 'left-humanitarian' and 'universalist' tendencies in contemporary Europe.

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Farewell to postcommunism: Conservative discourses during Putin's first term

During 2002–2003 the political platform of the Union of Right Forces, under the leadership of Boris Nemtsov and Irina Khakamada, shifted from the liberal-conservative position towards what may be called a 'left-liberal' stance, reminiscent of the Russian liberalism of the 1990s. Russian 'left liberalism', which throughout the 1990s was represented by the *Yabloko* (Apple) party of Grigory Yavlinsky, is constituted by a strongly cosmopolitan orientation that emphasises the universal character of liberal rights and freedoms as ontologically and axiologically prior to the nation-state, and a consequent delegitimisation of state intervention into individual and social practices. In contrast, state regulation of the economy is accepted insofar as it creates the conditions of minimal equality for individuals to practice their rights and freedoms. With the shift of the URF to the left, the conservative discourse lost its institutional vehicle and become dispersed among a series of platforms, from the short-lived weekly *Konservator* to Internet periodicals such as the *Civic Club* and the *Russian Journal*. The most ideologically coherent of these discursive groupings is the Seraphim Club, founded in January 2003 by three television commentators, presenting the polemical programme *Odnako* ('However') on Russia's Channel 1: Mikhail Leontiev, Maxim Sokolov, Alexander Privalov, as well as the editor-in-chief of the business journal *Expert* Valery Fadeev.

The 2003 Memorandum of the Seraphim Club proceeds from the assumption that sustainable economic growth is unachievable without a corresponding 'leap' in 'ideational growth' that must consist in overcoming inoperative political dualisms and the generation of the new ideological discourse. For the authors of the Memorandum, the primary obstacle to such a leap is the psychological alienation of the postcommunist elite from the new sociopolitical order: 'The elite, born out of a catastrophe, is only capable of reproducing catastrophic situations. *The trouble with the Russian elite is its certitude that the ship is sinking.* Our limp elite has written the country off'.[18] This defeatist disposition of the elite is taken to obscure the *already achieved* successes in liberal-democratic reforms. Indeed, a crucial feature of liberal conservatism according to the Seraphim Club is the focus on the 1990s as a period of important *achievements* in political and economic transformation that presently need to be ordered, consolidated and sedimented as the foundations of the new order.

Within this optimistic disposition, Alexander Hramchikhin is able to claim, against the prevailing negative view of the 1990s as a period of crisis and degradation, that the 1990s have rather been one of the 'brighter' periods of Russian history, the era of rapid and non-violent sociopolitical change, which has created the ground for a more evolutionary liberal project, no longer marked by political ruptures and societal dislocations. For Hramchikhin, the symptom of the defeatist worldview of the contemporary elite is the perception of the *illegitimacy* of the new Russian state, shared by both moderate liberals and the more 'nationalist-oriented' conservatives, which allegedly requires the discursive articulation of the 'new' or 'Third' Russia with its Imperial and Soviet

predecessors. 'The Third Russia has practically no patriots, at least among the elite, which is still divided among the patriots of the USA (or the "citizens of the world", which is the same thing) and the patriots of the USSR'.[19]

For Hramchikhin, it is therefore the development of a 'new patriotism' that is the condition of possibility of the stabilisation and consolidation of the decade of liberal reforms. The discourse of the Seraphim club specifies this concept in terms of an 'organic synthesis of Russia and Freedom', a formulation, which is a trademark of the writings of, e.g., Alexander Privalov and Maxim Sokolov.[20] Within this synthesis, the patriotic 'Russian idea' must be put in the service of ensuring and enhancing freedom, while the advocates of freedom must in turn become rooted in the new (but still irreducibly Russian) postcommunist realities. 'Russia is not doomed to forever oscillate between a xenophobic localism and a 'common-European' liberalism that could not be bothered to look around itself. We can only exit this century-old dead-end with the help of actors who realise their personal *responsibility* and are ready to act with the appropriate *humility*. They will be able to find *that other thought*, that other formula that can finally unite Russia and Freedom'.[21]

The synthesis of freedom and Russia takes concrete shape in the liberal-conservative reaffirmation of the principle of state sovereignty as the condition for the maintenance of Russia as an autonomous political subject. The defence of political subjectivity in the face of the challenge of globalisation is perhaps the central component of the (self-)definition of a liberal-conservative. According to Boris Mezhuev, the *conservative*, as opposed to a *traditionalist*, does not valorise the past, but rather opposes the future, and more specifically, the *dominant image of the future*, which in the contemporary context is offered by the notion of 'globalisation':

> Contemporary conservatism can only be 'antiglobalist' in the most popular sense of globalism. The future order that globalism brings about can be resisted in the name of the present order with its value of national sovereignty. [. . .] National sovereignty is the freedom of a nation to *be itself*. What 'being itself' means is decided situationally. It might mean opting for a monarchic form of government, to practice death penalty, etc. *I am against linking national identity concretely with some social institution. It simply consists in freedom*. And this freedom is presently disappearing.[22]

This fragment features a striking identification of sovereignty and freedom,[23] quite heterogeneous to contemporary Western critical discourses on sovereignty, and posits a conservative as a *partisan of pluralism* in the face of homogenising and universalising tendencies, associated with the processes of globalisation. Freedom is thus understood less as the attribute of the *individual* but rather as a characteristic of a *political community*, concretely exemplified by the nation-state. Thus, the Memorandum of the Seraphim Club envisions Russia as an assertive political subject that resists the levelling forces of the global liberal-democratic consensus, linking spiritual renaissance and economic modernisation into a single project of the reestablishment of sovereign subjectivity.[24]

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The discourse of liberal conservatism, as construed in the interpretations of the Putin project, in the programmatic discourses of 'right-wing' liberals and by the Seraphim club, appears to be becoming a contender for the status of the *hegemonic* discourse. According to Gleb Pavlovsky, a political advisor to the President, within the terrain defined by liberal conservatism Putin 'simply *can't be opposed*'.[25] The situationally conservative depoliticisation of liberalism renders redundant the more revolutionary liberalism of the 1990s and disarms the anti-liberal criticism from the left opposition by reinscribing liberalism within a statist and patriotic context. This simultaneous victory over the ideologically polarised forces of the 1990s has resulted in the curious situation, noted by a number of observers. A wide range of radical liberal reforms in such areas as labour relations, land ownership, the legal system, natural monopolies, centre-regions relations, that have constituted the prime sites of political antagonism during the abortive attempts at their implementation in the Yeltsin presidency, are undertaken by the Putin administration in a routine and business-like fashion without much controversy or polemic over their goals:

> Putin persistently works towards the reduction of uncertainty and unpredictability, *all the while remaining unpredictable himself*. [. . .] Putin introduces the state to Russia in the same way as the potato was introduced 300 years ago, *by a number of unnoticeable, almost embarrassingly infinitesimal steps.* This is obviously not a 'dictatorship' of any kind [. . .] but something like 'hegemony' that Gramsci spoke of: the *environment of new facts, catchphrases and doubtless advantages that permeates everything*.[26]

The effect of such a hegemonic sedimentation of the new order is a break with the Soviet past that is more profound than 'anti-Soviet' denunciations that still conjure up the negative image of the Soviet period in order to endow the new regime with post-revolutionary legitimacy. Such a break may be conceived in terms of the *completion* of the postcommunist 'transition'. To performatively declare the 'transitional period' to be over (as was done by Deputy Head of Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov the day after the triumphant victory of United Russia in the 2003 parliamentary elections) is, in terms of grammar, to remove the referent 'Soviet' from the 'simple past' tense to 'past perfect', the past already transcended by other past events and hence irrelevant to the present self-identification. In the phrase of Gleb Pavlovsky, 'for Russia the USSR is no longer relevant. Russia *refuses to be a post-Soviet (or an anti-Soviet) state*. Russia is simply Russia, which has to be taken into account'.[27]

The relation of liberal conservative discourse to the ideology of Soviet communism is thus in the strict sense *unproblematic*. In a clear contrast to the passionate polemic over the interpretation of Soviet history in the 1990s, when 'liberal' and 'communist' positions both deployed their discursive constructions of the Soviet past as weapons in contemporary ideological clashes, in the present ideological constellation history is thoroughly neutralised as a political tool and rather serves as the undifferentiated background for the current articulation of the rather half-hearted 'official patriotism'.[28] The 'deproblematisation' of Soviet communism is well symbolised by the 2000 Law on State Symbols, which

simultaneously officialised the Imperial coat of arms, the Republican tricolour flag and the Soviet anthem with new, purposefully neutral lyrics. Thus, it is possible to conceive of Putin's hegemonic project as in the strict sense *post-postcommunist,* since what it defines itself against is no longer the Soviet history but rather the revolutionary turmoil of the 1990s. The liberal conservatism of the presidency simultaneously seeks to stabilise the gains of the postcommunist revolution and to do away with the 'revolutionary disposition' with its flux, contingency and unfounded decisionism that hamper the implementation of the positive programme of liberal reforms. Paradoxically at first glance, liberal conservatism exemplifies both the *success* of the revolution and its ultimate *betrayal*, disavowing the contingent origins of the emergence of the present regime.[29] And yet, it is precisely this depoliticisation, brought about in the Putin project, that was challenged in the course of Putin's first term by a discourse that also sought to reclaim the mantle of conservatism, this time as a designator of the newly emergent *opposition* to the presidency.

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Times of troubles, then and now: Left conservatism and the return of the political

The new conservatism: The re-appropriation of the concept

It is certainly ironic that the alternative conservative discourse begins with the problematisation of precisely that which the liberal-conservatives consider to be the greatest achievement of the Putin presidency: the consolidation, sedimentation and depoliticisation of social life. The critique of Putin's liberal conservatism unites the representatives of the 'national-patriotic' movement of the 1990s and the younger commentators and analysts, who seek to articulate a conservative worldview that is more creative and pluralistic than the one embraced by CPRF and yet is heterogeneous to the liberal-conservative synthesis. During 2003 this discourse gathered political weight and found a locus of political representation in the Motherland movement, originally founded by Sergei Glaziev and Dmitry Rogozin, which emerged as a surprise winner of the 2003 elections.

While in the case of liberal conservatism it is relatively easy to identify the object of 'conservation' as the achievements of the reforms of the 1990s, it is at first glance difficult to conceive of the irreconcilable attitude of, e.g., the Motherland movement to these reforms as in any way conservative. Thus, the primary task of the 'new conservative' discourse is its self-definition and self-legitimation *as* conservative, which has resulted in an intellectually fascinating reconstruction of the concept. In this chapter we shall briefly revisit this reconstruction, relying primarily on the works of Mikhail Remizov, a political philosopher whose work has been central in the articulation of the 'new conservatism'.

Remizov begins with an epistemic reconstruction of the concept of conservatism in terms of 'emphatic particularism'.[30] Recalling Edmund Burke's classical definition of conservatism in terms of appreciation of the particular over

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the universal and of prejudices and customs over rational schemes, Remizov contrasts this disposition with another approach that argues for the primacy of the particular and the contextual—the left-wing 'critique of ideology'. While the latter condemns the universalist claims of ideology as being *in fact* conditioned by particular constellations of interests, conservatism aesthetises *this very particularity,* manifests and valorises it in its own self-presentation and criticises universalist claims solely as 'bad taste', a hypocritical refusal to practice philosophical or political discourse *in first person*. In other words, the historically conditioned and politically particularistic status of an idea is for a conservative its *truth-criterion*: a statement that is not spatio-temporally or contextually grounded is ipso facto *groundless*. Conservatism is thus defined epistemically as the *apology of prejudice*,[31] which accepts the irreducible pluralism of all cultures and modes of knowledge *except* those which pretend to be universal, decontextualised or multicultural: for Remizov, multi-culturalism is *not itself a culture* and hence is not to be taken into account.[32]

The second feature of conservatism is the inherently contradictory status of its object: conservatism arises as a problematic only because that which ought to be conserved *no longer exists*, is already corrupted or betrayed. 'Conservatism constitutes itself as an intellectual and aesthetic *reconstruction* of the lost integrity of life'.[33] In contrast to Polyakov's situational understanding of conservatism as the consolidation of the status quo, Remizov posits conservatism as constituted by the existentially tragic realisation of the non-existence of the object of conservation and thus the necessity to construe it in both thought and practice, which in turn renders its authenticity dubious. 'Historical conservatism enters the scene at the moment of fissure when it is too late 'to conserve'; thus, its path is from the outset one of reflection on and manipulation of those forms of experience *that may no longer be retained in their authenticity'*.[34] Thus, Remizov considers facile and immature the claims of those who reject the possibility of a Russian conservatism on the grounds that 'there is nothing to conserve in Russia'. The aporia of conservatism is inherent to its very definition: *conservation is required only when the valorised object is perceived as existentially problematic.*

However aporetic, the predicament of the lost object of conservation *defines* the essence of conservative thought, although the more specific response to this predicament may vary. Remizov distinguishes between four 'anthropological' types of conservatism, of which two are presented as ineffective and apolitical 'pseudomorphs'. The 'realist' type of conservatism (which ought not to be confused with the tradition of political realism) accepts the progressivist teleology and resigns itself to playing the role of the static element in the modernist movement of progress, a *brake* in the teleological advance. Within the Russian political field this stance is represented by the 'centrist' position of, e.g., the Our Home Russia party in 1995–1999, which was not opposed to the overall course of liberal reforms, but was critical of the 'shock-therapeutic' mode of their implementation and advocated a more 'gradual', 'balanced' and 'pragmatic' strategy of reforms. Remizov argues that realism is ultimately a *depoliticising* strategy that finds its 'anthropological' type in the caricaturised figure of the

bureaucrat: 'It is easy to see that if everyone was a 'realist', no *situation* could ever even *arise*'.[35] The price of being the defenders of the status quo, 'in touch' with 'reality as it is', is therefore political muteness and impotence.

The second 'anthropological' type of a conservative is what Remizov refers to as a 'knight of the impossible' or a 'beautiful soul'. This figure is similar to the realist in unwittingly accepting the progressivist paradigm, but refuses any participation in the 'evolutionary' process and resigns himself to condemning the sins of the world from a comfortable outside location. The beautiful-soul conservative thus takes on the role of both the judge and the victim of the existing order, but, according to Remizov, only serves to maintain this order by posing as its marginal figure, both dis*place*d and un*time*ly in his almost comical clinging to the vestiges of the past. In the present context, the example of such a disposition is provided by the orthodox Marxist–Leninist position of the 'left wing' of the CPRF. This style of conservatism assumes the enunciative modality of an *a priori outsider*, whose political significance does not exceed the project of furnishing a minoritarian lifestyle.

For Remizov, 'the capacity of conservatism to acquire political meaning is a question of a massive epistemological revision of the 'modern' worldview. In this task the *conservative can not but be radical*, for radicalism is precisely the capacity to question the self-evident, to transform the basic codes of reality. [Thereby], the realists will become *cynics* and the knights of the impossible will not fail to become *extremists*'.[36] The *cynics* are the realists who have dispensed with all 'ideals' and moral precepts but rather assert the brute *facticity of existence* as fundamental and romanticise sovereign power and political antagonism as a mode of authentic existence. While conservative realism is embodied in the depoliticised figure of the bureaucrat, cynicism finds its enunciative modality in the figure of the 'advisor to the Prince', loyal to any form of order once it is established and valorising the acts of sovereignty as the instance of 'real life', rupturing the routinised and technologised existence.[37]

The alternative 'virtuous' disposition of conservatism, *extremism*, is apparently the most difficult to articulate with the conventional understanding of the conservative style. Extremism is understood by Remizov as a radicalisation of the 'beautiful-soul' disposition, whereby the 'cynical fundamentals' of existence are cast not as exterior to human being but as brought into being by human *will* and properly political *acts*, 'without grounds or justification'.[38] In contrast to cynicism, extremism remains an 'outsider' position but deploys this very exteriority as a political force. Extreme conservatism explicitly attempts to create, in acts of political will that 'emanate from nothingness',[39] that which it claims to be already there. The new objectivity is thus created in an act of pure subjectivity that *realises itself as such*. 'History will go where it is directed to go, and worlds are created out of nothing—does not this apotheosis of the subject make conservatism an *ideology of freedom in its deepest and anti-liberal sense*?'[40]

The Russian 'new conservatism', of which Remizov himself is a representative, arguably gravitates between the cynical and extremist poles of 'radical conservatism'. Yet, the cynical 'romanticisation of the political' in the Russian

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context appears to be disabled by, first, the alienation of the conservatives in question from the new Russian state, and, second, by the tendencies towards depoliticisation in the Putin presidency, which are the focus of sharp criticism within this circle. Let us discuss these positions in greater detail.

The left-conservative opposition: Towards a general delegitimation of the 1990s

The first crucial feature of the 'new conservatism' is its irreconcilable opposition to the political regime that descends from the anticommunist revolution of August 1991 and the *resistance to the gradual legitimisation of the 'oligarchic capitalist' order*, the popular acceptance of the 'injustice' of the reforms of the 1990s as a 'historical fact' and the appearance of the post-revolutionary order as a 'new objectivity'. At the same time, the very failure of such depoliticising efforts during the 1990s[41] is viewed as indicative of the *a-political* nature of Russian liberalism, incapable of open political confrontation and choosing to present its maxims in terms of 'common-sense' and 'no-alternative' discourses. For Remizov, the liberals, apparently triumphant in the 'civil war' of 1991–1993 failed to become *victors* in this war, precisely due to their incapacity to reconstitute this victory as a hegemonic project, depoliticise the foundational *moment* as a constitutional *foundation* and thus *universalise* their manifestly particularist, sectarian stance.[42] The object of critique is therefore the manifest lack of the *phenomeno-technical capacity* of liberalism,[43] which was also noted by such liberal-conservatives as Privalov and Hramchikhin. Unlike these authors, Remizov views this failure as not merely an error to be corrected but as an indicator of the inadequacy of the very notion of revolution as a designator of the events of the early 1990s, which should rather be thought of as a 'time of troubles' (*smuta*): 'Revolution *begins* in the moment when the newly mobilised subject with claims to authority enters the scene. The time of troubles *ends* in this very moment'.[44]

This distinction is crucial for establishing one's relation to the Putin presidency: if we perceive the events of 1991 as a revolution, then the present moment may be thought in the liberal-conservative terms of stabilisation and normalisation, the crystallisation of the 'social energy' freed in the revolutionary moment. On the contrary, if one perceives the 1990s as a 'time of troubles', what is at stake at present is not stabilisation, but rather the *constitution* of a new revolutionary positivity, a task for which a Putinian 'pragmatism' is entirely ill-fitted. The ultimate divergence between liberal and new conservatisms is now clear: the latter denies the very *legitimacy* of the new Russia that the former wishes to consolidate as a *sovereign political subject*, viewing the 'August revolution' not as the foundational moment of the new Russian history but as its 'black hole'. This is not to say that left conservatism necessarily remains tied to the valorisation of Soviet communism in any of its historical forms, but rather that it perceives the collapse of the Soviet order in the purely negative terms as a catastrophe that ushered in an era of nihilism and degradation. While the liberal-conservative discourse deproblematises the ideology of Soviet communism, paving the way for the conservative restylisation of the present in terms of continuity with the

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ideologically undifferentiated past, left conservatism problematises precisely this postulate of continuity as concealing the disastrous rupture, from which the new regime genealogically descends.

At the same time, the electoral success of the Putin project makes the argument about the *absurdity* of liberal conservatism insufficient. Thus, the 2003–2004 writings of the proponents of 'new conservatism' are marked by a bitter anxiety regarding precisely the *likelihood* of this 'impossible' liberal-conservative hegemony:

> The decade of reforms was sufficient to come to terms with 'being-thrown-into-the-market' as something inevitable. Two years of Putin's 'rule' were sufficient to spontaneously *legitimate the post-Soviet structural degradation of society [...] as a constituted and adequate reality.* This is the necessary precondition of the conservative politico-psychological complex: the ability to perceive one's social environment not in terms of collapse, catastrophe or a chaotic 'transitional moment' but as a crystallised reality, with regard to which it is possible to talk about 'conservation', 'reproduction' and 'transformation'.[45]

For Remizov, it is only with the advent of Putin that the monstrous phantom of 'post-Soviet Russia' could claim its right to be recognised as a reality, which makes possible the articulation of 'liberal conservatism'. Ironically, the time of troubles of the early 1990s is presently succeeded by a no less troublesome moment of the Putinian hegemony.

In the course of 2003, the 'new conservative' strand of discourse defined itself as the *'left-conservative opposition'* to the Putin presidency. Let us discuss in greater detail each term in this definition. The 'leftism' of the new conservatism is concretely exemplified by the demand for the thoroughgoing revision of the results of the process of privatisation, the unwillingness to 'come to terms' with the oligarchic regime that emerged in the 1990s. At the same time, Remizov seeks to distinguish this stance from the doctrinaire 'leftist' worldview, still entertained by the more orthodox members of the CPRF, that conceives of private property *as such* as an evil and preaches a facile understanding of economic and social equality.[46] Left-conservatives appear to have no disagreement with the market economic order in principle but emphasise the illegitimate nature of the Russian privatisation, particularly with regard to natural resources. It is therefore impossible to equate the left-conservative discourse with the nostalgic valorisation of the ideology of Soviet communism. At the same time, Boris Mezhuev notes that the leftism of left conservatism ought not to be confused with the contemporary Western left-wing 'anti-globalism', which accepts, ontologically and hence politically, the *reality* of 'globalisation' and the withering away of sovereign statehood. Referring specifically to the increasingly fashionable (quasi-)Deleuzian approach of Hardt and Negri,[47] Mezhuev clearly distinguishes this 'globalist critique of globalisation' from the left-conservative assertion of the irreducibility of the principle of sovereignty.[48] Similarly, Konstantin Krylov claims that the task for left-conservative thought consists in the *critique of the objectification of globalisation* as an inherent condition, a 'postmodern' *state of affairs* rather than

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as a particular *paradigm*.[49] Left conservatism therefore casts globalisation not as an 'objective phenomenon', around which particular struggles over 'alternative globalisation' may take place, but as in itself a form of *political struggle*, a friend/enemy distinction, constituted by 'the globalisers' and 'the globalised'.

Secondly, the left-conservative circle faces the task of defining what is specifically *conservative* about it in the context of the Putinian political consolidation. Taking into consideration the rejectionism of left-conservatives with regard to the 'August settlement' of 1991 it is easy to understand that their conservatism is furthest away from centrist or realist positions, but is rather a radical project, well summed up in Yegor Holmogorov's slogan 'Towards the *restoration of the future*!' Despite the absence of the univocal valorisation of the Soviet past in the left-conservative discourse, Holmogorov urges the conservative movement to enunciate a Nietzschean 'yes, yes' position on the tabooed issue of 'returning to the past', reversing the course of history that began in 1991. And yet, this return must not be thought in the facile and impossible sense of returning to the juncture at which Russia allegedly went astray, but rather as a *restoration of that present which would have been the future*, had the correct path not been abandoned, a restoration of 'that better future which the past was pregnant with'.[50] In Remizov's terms, it is precisely the aporia of the 'lost object' of conservation that reorients left-conservatives towards a radically futuristic project: 'Due to the divergence of the lines of the 'present future' and the 'project future' we end up in a *wide space of creativity*. This platform will be truly left-conservative, as it combines the conservative reliance on the past and the left-wing orientation towards the future'.[51]

Finally, we ought to address the third term in the concept of 'left-conservative opposition'. In the consensual atmosphere of the Putin presidency, the very emergence of the new opposition, beyond the weakened CPRF and the dwindling Westernist-liberal minority, is in itself a significant event. The key feature of left-conservative opposition is the critique of the universalisation of *economic rationality* that permeates the entire discourse of the Putin presidency, whereby even the governmental mechanisms and the operations of the state are subjected to the logic of economic efficiency and the coveted 'Russian national idea' is presented in terms of 'efficient statehood'.[52] It is this rationality of neoliberal governance that attracts liberal-conservatives to the Putin presidency, as it exemplifies the functioning of liberal governmental practices in the post-revolutionary modality. On the contrary, it is precisely this economy-centric pragmatism that Remizov decries as the instance of ultimate depoliticisation.

> The problem is not economic rationality itself but the attempt to universalise it as a model of social relations and to conceive of the 'market' as a matrix of society. This is precisely what happens when the President suggests that efficiency and competitiveness are the exhaustive definition of 'our national idea'. *Pretending to represent the Whole, rationality degenerates into rationalism*.[53]

The critique of 'pragmatism' also concerns the wider aspects of the Putin project, most notably the atmosphere of normalisation, consolidation and

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consensus that it brings about. 'The Russian political class lacks an ideational-political matrix of antagonism. It is *amorphous* and hence *substantively united*. Its consensus is defined by the unanimity of ideological dumbness, the refusal of any value-based antagonism. It is a *consensus by default*, a mirror image of the absent-minded and indifferent consensus in the society'.[54] Remizov interprets the normalising drive of the Putin presidency in terms of the extreme indifference to the political, whereby political meaning as such evaporates in the unstructured and amorphous space of 'positive indifference' towards the President on behalf of the so-called 'Putin's majority', the 70% of the electorate united by little more than a certain mild fondness for the President, who, according to the polls, is trusted a lot less than one's family members and a little more than one's work colleagues.[55]

Remizov's critique of the depoliticised 'logic of normal life' invokes a Schmittian argument on the primacy of the exceptional decision to the constituted norm: the bureaucratic logic of pragmatically 'doing business' may only unfold within a preconstituted domain of 'politics', the *delineation* of which is the prerogative of the sovereign political act that the Putin presidency persistently seeks to *avoid*.[56] 'Prior to serving the society, the authority must invent it. Prior to the appearance of the interests of society, there has to be made a decision on what this society is. The demand for the project means simply that this decision must now be made'.[57] The tragic irony of this disposition is that it is logically driven to embrace the position of *authority* (any order being *a priori* 'good', as long as it is *established*) and welcome *any* sovereign decision as an authentic political act. And yet, in the present Russian reality, it is precisely the sovereign, i.e. President Putin himself, that *contributes* to the depoliticising trend, being almost single-handedly responsible for installing the new hegemonic political style that is opposed to the very principle of the political as a value-based antagonism. The President fails to utilise his sovereign power of decision, sacrificing his *legitimacy* as a sovereign to revel in his *popularity* as, ultimately, a 'private individual': 'The very subjectivity of power is repressed by the demand for consensus'.[58] Therefore, to reassert political subjectivity is to rupture hegemonic stability at the price of the open manifestation of *conflict*. Another key difference of left conservatism from the doctrinaire ideology of Soviet communism is its embrace and active promotion of political pluralism, even in its most antagonistic forms, as the condition for rupturing the depoliticised 'indifferent consensus' in the Russian society.

It is at this point that the failure of the left-conservatives to establish a discursive position close to the sovereign locus (and hence occupy the enunciative modality of 'cynics') leads them to the extremist modality, whereby conflict is *welcomed* as an 'instance of the Real' in the conditions of the false lull of depoliticisation. It is no coincidence that the only acts of President Putin that have attracted the positive assessment of these critics are those minor yet noticeable *exceptions* that the President took with regard to his own image of an apolitical manager. The figure of Putin is arguably marked by the irreducible dualism, whereby the 'positivity' of the President as a liberal-conservative 'stabiliser' is punctured by the President's own rhetorical forays into the domain of the obscene, evident in his uncharacteristically harsh stances on a number of issues, be it the arrest of

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Mikhail Khodorkovsky or the uncompromising position with regard to Chechen separatism.[59] Two interpretations of this dualism are enunciated in the left-conservative circle. On the one hand, there is a conspiratorial view of Putin, entertained during the early years of the presidency by such figures as Alexander Prokhanov, as secretly 'one of us', a 'secret agent' in the enemy camp, the one who always 'says less', both quantitatively and qualitatively, than he 'thinks'.[60]

The more nuanced view is offered by Remizov, for whom a hidden or latent political project is a contradiction in terms, the project being necessarily phenomenal rather than noumenal and hence contained *without remainder* in the actually occurring discursive practices. '"Putin's soul" is a metaphysical prejudice. [...] We simply need to recognise that there is nothing beneath the apparent, *even if the apparent hints towards the existence of a secret*. Secretiveness is the last resort of power, which no longer has anything about it that could deserve being hidden. Thus, Putin 'wants' precisely that which he talks about, i.e. *nothing*'.[61] In line with the liberal-conservative reading, Putinism is thus interpreted as merely the logical conclusion of the nihilism of the 1990s: if Putin is a patriot, his 'patria' is the 'New Russia' of decadent hedonism that left-conservatives consider an abominable historical accident. Putin's 2004 Address to the Federal Assembly confirmed the left-conservative diagnosis with its formulation of the Russian 'national idea' in terms of the triad of 'Security, Freedom and Comfort'.[62] According to Stanislav Belkovsky, 'the speech positioned Putin as a *fierce anti-conservative*, and consequently as a *radical liberal* to the core', so that the author is able to entitle his article '*Putin Becomes Chubais*'.[63]

Left conservatives are thus either resigned to the loyalty to what is ultimately a phantasm of their own creation or must rupture the existing political consensus by abandoning the reverence for the sovereign. Remizov ventures that despite the simulative nature of Putin's exceptional sovereign gestures the 'premonition of the Sovereign' in the Russian society may start a life of its own, independent of the figure of the President. However limited in scope, the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and the controversy over the oil company Yukos in 2003–2004 are held to have politicised for the first time the question of the results of the privatisation, taking this issue out of the domain of intra-elite intrigues and into the space of public discourse. The rise of the Motherland movement, which openly enunciated the discourse that many conservatives attributed to Putin in a 'latent' manner, points to the dissolution of the dualistic myth of the President as both a sovereign and a 'liberal manager' through the bi-polarisation of the *actual* political spectrum. In this sense, left conservatism may ultimately be read as the *materialisation of the sovereign spectre of Putin*. In Remizov's ominous prophecy, 'millions of people are looking for a black cat in a pitch-black room. They almost see it. Eventually, it will jump out'.[64]

Russian conservatism and the 1990s: Trauma and the effacement of the event

In conclusion, let us address the significance of the discourse of conservatism in the current political constellation in Russia. After the 2003 elections one

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frequently encounters the definition of the current Russian political spectrum as circumscribed by the limit figures of Dmitry Rogozin (Motherland) and Anatoly Chubais (URF), with President Putin occupying the hegemonic middle ground. For our purposes, this reading, despite being an evident simplification of the still highly fragmented political spectrum, leads to the striking conclusion that the discourse of conservatism, dispersed into 'liberal' and 'left' strands, presently defines the *entire* political space in Russia. However, these two discursive strands are directed towards entirely different 'objects of conservation': the post-1991 'new Russia' in the case of liberal conservatism and the futuristic construct of the 'sovereign Russia', espoused in the left-conservative design for the 'restoration of the future'. What unites these two disparate trends into a hegemonic constellation is the centrality of the principle of sovereignty, the perception of Russia as a autonomous political subject, no longer owing its 'identity' to external validation, and the desire to overcome the flux and instability, characteristic of the Russian politics of the 1990s.

At the same time, the Foucauldian approach to discourse as a system of dispersion entails an attunement to the *tactical polyvalence* of discursive practices,[65] whereby the latter may function in the modality of both support and resistance within the hegemonic field. In the current constellation, it is in fact the 'extremist' left conservatism that contributes to the increasing pluralisation of the political space and thereby exemplifies *resistance* to the Putinian hegemony. Moreover, this 'repoliticisation' should not be equated with the resurgence of the nostalgic discourses of the Soviet period: the affinity of left conservatism to the ideology of Soviet communism is exhausted by the perception of the demise of the Soviet order as a historical catastrophe. From the perspective of a political theorist, one of the most fascinating features about left conservatism is rather its intellectual novelty, particularly its indebtedness to the contemporary Western poststructuralist or 'postmodern' philosophy, with which conservatism shares the philosophical heritage of Nietzsche and Heidegger.[66] Ironically, the Habermasian label 'young conservatives' with regard to French poststructuralists is entirely true in the Russian context, since the most fruitful applications of poststructuralist criticism are to be found, politically, on the 'conservative' part of the spectrum and tend to be practiced by younger scholars.[67] This situation is not entirely surprising, insofar as one may read poststructuralism itself in a politically reductionist manner as a *non-Marxist critique of liberalism*. Besides, in the context of Russia's persistent efforts at 'catching up' or 'integrating' with the West, the powerful auto-critique of the West, advanced in poststructuralist philosophy, might indeed raise a question about the attractiveness of the West as an object of emulation—a point made repeatedly by left-conservative critics.

The existence of this post-structuralist/conservative nexus has important consequences for the attempts at a critique of 'left conservatism'. It is entirely illusory and self-complacent to suggest that a 'deconstructionist' approach may unravel this discourse, simply because, as our discussion has demonstrated, it posits itself as explicitly anti-essentialist and dispenses with any valorisation of originary authenticity. Both the recognition of the inherent aporia of the object of

conservation and the assertion of radical epistemic particularism render left conservatism immune to the denaturalising and historicising pathos of deconstruction, similarly to the Schmittian ontology of political exceptionalism, which may well be considered the ultimate *limit* of deconstructive thought rather than its easy *target*.[68] In many ways, left conservatism is in itself an impressive attempt at a *deconstruction of* '*Putinism*'.

This critical disposition of left conservatism also points to the fact that *pace* the frequently facile criticism of the Putin presidency and the bemusing attempts to locate a 'liberal opposition' to Putin's regime, the only properly oppositional force in contemporary Russia is in fact the *opposition to Putin's liberalism,* which presently contributes to greater pluralism in Russian politics and whose advent to power is indeed arrested by the Putinian hegemonic order of 'managed democracy'. This is not to say that the agonistic appreciation of political pluralism is inherent to left conservatism, particularly insofar as this discourse is openly scornful about the incontestable stature of the precepts of Western liberal democracy. The statements of its practitioners are marked by a high degree of intolerance of the Russia of the 1990s, which makes it conceivable that the possible 'left-conservative hegemony' would be marked by a series of violent closures. Indeed, in its relation to the anticommunist revolution of the 1990s left conservatism reveals itself as thoroughly paradoxical. On the level of *political ontology*, it enacts the spectre of the political against the liberal-conservative drive for depoliticisation, affirming the obscene excess of the new order in its attempt at re-politicising it. At the same time, on the level of its substantive programme of the thoroughgoing revision of the results of postcommunist socioeconomic reforms, this standpoint itself disavows the spectrality of the revolutionary moment of the 1990s in its utterly rejectionist approach to this period as a somehow 'inauthentic' event, a mere 'time of troubles', unworthy of the name of Revolution.

We may venture that despite their differences *both* strands of the conservative discourse seek to efface the event of postcommunism, either via its *depoliticisation* or *demonisation*. What this 'infidelity' to the revolution points to is the 'trauma' of the encounter with the 'Real' in Žižek's sense, the experience of the 1990s as a properly revolutionary Event that points to the conditions of possibility of the new order being simultaneously the conditions of the impossibility of its closure into self-immanence. Similarly to the Foucauldian understanding of the revolution in terms of an existential disposition rather than substantive transformation, expressed in the epigraph to this article, Žižek's notion of the revolutionary trauma highlights the fact that the essence of revolution is contained not in its positive gains but in the *negativity* it reveals at the very heart of the social order.[69] As both Schmittian and post-structuralist approaches suggest, 'society' (or any form of constituted order) is *impossible* insofar as it is always plagued by the obscene excess that cannot be subsumed under it. In the Russian context, the '1990s' stand precisely for that obscene supplement that renders impossible any attempt to conceive of order as self-immanent or founded in an immaculate conception.

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And yet, it is facile to infer from this argument for impossibility the *non-existence* of the foundational event—a gesture that would be both a philosophical and a political platitude. Along with Žižek, we shall rather suggest that the 'Real *happens'*, the revolutionary event *takes place*, the undecidable is in fact *decided*—and *that* is what is *impossible* to come to terms with.[70] The Russian conservative discourse in both its varieties is thus marked by the traumatic awareness of the impossibility of *what actually took place*. As Artemiy Magun argues with regard to the simultaneous minimalism and profundity of the Russian revolution of 1991, 'revolutionary negation has no substance, it is in no way determined. [. . .] The revolution simply consists in the fact that *something* started moving, that *something took place*'.[71] As an Event that is *irreducible to the order of being,* as an act of radical freedom involved in the decisionist foundation 'out of nothingness',[72] the moment of the political in the 1990s is unsettling for both liberal-conservatives (as the testimony to the radically non-conservative origin of the object of conservation) and left-conservatives (as the testimony to the absolute indifference of the principle of the political to the substance of the foundational act). And yet, one ought to be reserved in the condemnation of Russian conservatism for this failure to come to terms with the 1990s, if only because a *properly political politics* (i.e. a politics attuned to its 'impossible', aporetic character) still remains to be invented.

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Notes and references

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3. See, e.g., Mikhail Kochkin, 'The Birth Pangs of Russian Conservatism', *Russia and Eurasia Review*, Vol. 2, No. 6 (2003); Heikki Patomaki and Christer Pursiainen, 'Western Models and 'the Russian Idea': Beyond Inside/Outside in Discourses on Civil Society', *Millennium,* Vol. 29, No. 1 (1999); S.G. Simonsen, 'Nationalism and the Russian Political Spectrum: Locating and Evaluating the Extremes', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 6(3) (2001); Gregor James, 'Fascism and the New Russian Nationalism', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 33(1) (1998).
4. Artemiy Magun, 'Opyt i Ponyatie Revolutsii', *Novoje Literaturnoje Obozrenie*, Vol. 64 (2003): http://magazines.russ.ru/nlo/2003/64/magun4.html. Emphasis added. All translations from Russian in this article are made by the author.
5. Michel Foucault, 'Politics and Reason', in Lawrence D. Kritzman (Ed.) *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture. Interviews and Other Writings 1977–1984* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 59. Emphasis added.
6. Sergei Prozorov, *Political Pedagogy of Technical Assistance: A Study in Historical Ontology of Russian Postcommunism* (Tampere: Studia Politica Tamperensis, 2004), Chapter 1.
7. Leonid Polyakov, 'Liberalny Konservator', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta,* 18 (2000). See also Samuel Huntington, 'Conservatism as an Ideology', *American Political Science Review* 51 (1957), 454–473. For the more detailed exposition of the relation of conservatism to the substantive ideologies of liberalism and socialism see Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (London: Clarendon Press, 1996), Part 3.
8. Vladimir Putin, 'Rossiya na Rubezhe Tysyacheletiy', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 230 (1999).
9. See Richard Sakwa, *Russia's Crisis and Yeltsin's Leadership* (University of Tampere: Gateway Papers, Vol. 4, 1999); Richard Sakwa, 'Crisis and Reconstitution of the State in Russia' in Helena Rytövuori-Apunen (Ed.) *Russian–European Interfaces in the Northern Dimension of the European Union* (Tampere: Studia Politica Tamperensis, 2000); Martin Nicholson, 'Putin's Russia: Slowing the Pendulum Without Stopping the Clock', *International Affairs*, 77(3) (2001), Prozorov, *op. cit*., Ref. 6, Chapter 4.

10. Vladimir Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation* (2001): http://www.russiaeurope.mid.ru/RussiaEurope/speech7.html.
11. Yegor Gaidar, 'Revolutsiya Ostalas' v 20-m veke; Reformy Prodolzhayutsa v 21-m', *Izvestia*, 6 (2001).
12. Polyakov, *op. cit*, Ref. 7.
13. Alexei Ulykaev, 'Pravy Povorot', *Polit.ru* (1999): http://www.polit.ru/documents/147910.html.
14. Ulykaev, *ibid*.
15. See Renato Cristi, *Carl Schmitt and Authoritarian Liberalism* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998); Sergei Prozorov, 'Three Theses on Governance and the Political', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 7 (2004).
16. See Yegor Holmogorov, 'Poezd Vne Raspisania', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2004): http://www.russ.ru/columns/reaction/20040324-hm.html.
17. See Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996). For an application of this distinction to contemporary Russian politics see Vyacheslav Morozov, 'V Poiskah Evropy: Rossiysky Politichesky Diskurs i Okruzhajushy Mir', *Neprikosnovenny Zapas*, Vol. 4 (2003): http://magazines.russ.ru/nz/2003/4/moroz.html.
18. Mikhail Leontiev *et al*., *Memorandum Serafimovskogo Kluba* (2003): http://www.serafim-club.ru/about/o.shmtl.
19. Aleksandr Hramchikhin, 'Gody Natsionalnoy Katastrofy, ili Luchshee Vremya v Istorii Gosudarstva Rossijskogo', *Grazhdanskie Debaty* (2004): http://www.globalrus.ru/opinions/136984.
20. See Maxim Sokolov, 'Epitafia Slovu Konservator: Benefis Setevogo Berdicheva', *Grazhdanskie Debaty* (2003): http://www.globalrus.ru/opinions/132430; Aleksandr Privalov, 'Tovarish, Ver'!', *Expert*, Vol. 20 (1999).
21. Privalov, *op. cit*., Ref. 20. Emphasis added.
22. Boris Mezhuev cited in 'Konservator-2, ili Novogodny Surpriz ot Leibmana', *Kreml.Org* (2003): http://www.kreml.org/calendar/docs/13044138.
23. See Prozorov, *op. cit*., Ref. 6, Chapter 5, for a different philosophical linkage of sovereignty and freedom, achieved through a synthesis of political ontologies of Carl Schmitt and Michel Foucault.
24. Leontiev, *op. cit*., Ref. 18. Emphasis added. The attribution of freedom to the political community in the discourse of liberal conservatism does not entail the dispossession of the individual of his freedom. On the contrary, it is the conceptual transfer of the pluralist vision from the domestic realm to the international sphere that makes possible the equation of state sovereignty with freedom.
25. Gleb Pavlovsky, 'Proshai Belovezhje!', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta,* 235 (2000). It is no coincidence that after the two years of conventional liberal rhetoric the Union of Right Forces attempted an (ultimately unsuccessful) return to the liberal-conservative position during the 2003 election campaign with Anatoly Chubais's controversial blueprint for a 'liberal empire', which posits Russia as a strong liberal state, capable of establishing the hegemony of its principles throughout the post-Soviet space. See Anatoly Chubais, 'Missiya Rossii v 21-m Veke', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 209 (2003).
26. Pavlovsky, *ibid*.
27. Pavlovsky, *ibid*. Emphasis added.
28. For a powerful critique of this 'abstract patriotism' of liberal conservatism see Alexander Tsipko, 'Lovushki Abstraktnogo Patriotizma', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta,* 223 (2000).
29. Cf. Magun, *op. cit*., Ref. 4. For the analysis of the Russian postcommunist transformation as a 'Great Revolution' see Vladimir Mau and Irina Starodubrovskaya, *The Challenge of Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
30. Mikhail Remizov, 'Apologia Predvzyatosti', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2002): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20021111-rem.html. For the more detailed analysis of the conservative episteme see Mikhail Remizov, *Opyt Konservativnoj Kritiki* (Moskva: Pragmatika Kultury, 2003). Cf. Freeden, *op. cit*, Ref. 7, Part 3.
31. Mikhail Remizov, 'Vvedenie v Epistemologiu Konservatizma', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2003): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20030117-rem.html.
32. Remizov, *op. cit*., Ref. 30.
33. Mikhail Remizov, 'Opyty Antropologii Konservatizma. Opyt Pervy: Psevdomorfozy', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2000): http://www.russ.ru/politics/partaktiv/20000920.html. See also Mikhail Remizov, 'Opyty Antropologii Konservatizma. Opyt Vtoroj: Litsa Non-Grata', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2000): http://www.russ.ru/politics/partaktiv/20001004_remizov.html.
34. Mikhail Remizov, 'Vtoroye Dyhanie', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2002): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20030214-rem.html. This approach radicalises as an existential disposition Huntington's thesis that situational conservative arguments are deployed when an existing order may not longer be legitimised in its substantive terms, i.e. when its substantive values lose their self-evidence. See Huntington, *op. cit.*, Ref. 7.

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35. Remizov, *op. cit*., Ref. 33.
36. Remizov, *ibid*. Emphasis added.
37. Cf. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), pp. 15–16.
38. Mikhail Remizov, 'Opyty Antropologii Konservatizma. Opyt Vtoroj: Litsa Non-Grata', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2000): http://www.russ.ru/politics/partaktiv/20001004_remizov.html.
39. Schmitt, *op. cit*., Ref. 37, p. 32.
40. Remizov, *op. cit.*, Ref. 38.
41. See Prozorov, *op. cit*, Ref. 6, pp. 332–338 for the discussion of this failure in terms of the 'lingering of the political' in Russian postcommunism.
42. Mikhail Remizov, 'Predchuvstvie Suverena', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2003): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20031030-rem.html.
43. See Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, 'In the Name of Society, or Three Theses on the History of Social Thought', *History of the Human Sciences*,10(3) (1997).
44. Mikhail Remizov, ''Smuta' ili 'Revolutsia'?', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2002): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20020909-rem.html.
45. Mikhail Remizov, 'Russkie Vne Sebya, ili Konservatism Protiv Konservatizma', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2003): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20030131-remizov.html. Emphasis added.
46. Remizov, *ibid*.
47. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2000).
48. Boris Mezhuev, 'Ostorozhnee s Leviznoy', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2003): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20030924-mezh.html.
49. Konstantin Krylov, 'Rossiya v Tretjey Pozitsii', *Portal Sotsial-Demokraticheskoj Politiki* (2003): http://www.pdsp.ru/docs/tribune/Conserv/1/1142.html.
50. Yegor Holmogorov, 'K Restavratsii Budushego', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2003): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20030926-holm.html.
51. Remizov, *op. cit*., Ref. 31.
52. See Prozorov, *op. cit*., Ref. 6, Chapter 4.
53. Mikhail Remizov, 'Revolutsiya Dolzhna Byt' Konservativnoy', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2003): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20030922-rem.html.
54. Mikhail Remizov, 'Den' Obshenatsionalnoj Skuki', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2000): http://www.russ.ru/politics/events/20001109_remizov.html.
55. Mikhail Remizov, ''Gosudarstvenniki' Protiv Gosudarstva', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2003): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20030303-rem.html.
56. Remizov, *ibid*.
57. Remizov, *ibid*.
58. Remizov, *ibid*.
59. See Prozorov, *op. cit*., Ref. 6, pp. 325–330.
60. Mikhail Remizov, 'Kurs Putina vs. Mif Putina', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2003): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20030905-rem.html.
61. Mikhail Remizov, ''Putin' kak Slovo Parazit', *Russkiy Zhurnal* (2002): http://www.russ.ru/politics/20020327-rem.html.
62. Vladimir Putin, *Poslanie Federalnomu Sobraniu Rossiyskoj Federatsii* (2004): http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2004/05/64879.shtml. See also Konstantin Krylov, 'Putinskaya Triada: Bezopasnost', Svoboda, Komfort', *Agenstvo Politicheskih Novostey* (2004): http://www.apn.ru.
63. Stanislav Belkovsky, 'Paternalism Abandoned: Putin Becomes Chubais', *Moscow Times*, May 27 (2004): http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2004/05/27/010.html.
64. Remizov, *op. cit*., Ref. 42.
65. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality. Volume One: An Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 99–100.
66. For the philosophical exploration of this lineage see e.g., Alan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Richard Wolin, *The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
67. Besides the already discussed work of Remizov, who is strongly influenced by both Nietzsche and Foucault, the confluence of conservatism and poststructuralism is also evident in the work of such theorists as Andrei Ashkerov and Nikita Garadzha, and such political commentators as Stanislav Belkovsky.
68. See Prozorov, *op. cit*., Ref. 15 for the more detailed discussion of this theme.

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69. See Sergei Prozorov, 'X/Xs: Toward a General Theory of the Exception', *Alternatives* 30 (2005) for the more detailed discussion of the negativity inherent in the constitutive revolutionary event. See also Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression' in Donald F. Bouchard (Ed.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practices: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); Mika Ojakangas, *A Philosophy of Concrete Life: Carl Schmitt and the Political Thought of Late Modernity* (Jyvaskyla: SoPhi, 2004); Jacques Ranciere, 'Ten Theses on Politics', *Theory and Event,* 5 (2001).
70. Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Slavoj Žižek* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 166.
71. Magun, *op. cit*., Ref. 4.
72. Žižek and Daly, *op. cit*., Ref. 70, pp. 135–138.

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